

# Pool Cool: Skin Cancer Meets Its Match

by: Ashley Adorante

## SUMMARY

Kansas Pool Cool is a sun safety education program aimed at an important audience: kids at the pool! Lifeguards, swim instructors, and other pool staff are trained to teach kids about sun safety during their swim lessons. The setting is ideal for instructors to describe the benefits of sun protection, and the dangers of overexposure. Key members of the Kansas Cancer Partnership (KCP)—the Kansas Comprehensive Cancer Prevention & Control Program and Midwest Cancer Alliance—successfully expanded the program in 2015. Kansas Pool Cool can now teach more kids how to stay safe in the sun than ever before.



## CHALLENGE

Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer in the United States. Almost five million people are treated for skin cancer in the U.S. every year.

Treatment can be stressful, time-consuming, disfiguring, and costly. In some cases, skin cancer is deadly, and more than nine thousand Americans die from it annually. The deadliest form of skin cancer, melanoma, is usually caused by exposure to ultraviolet (UV) light. Most of these cases are preventable.

Unfortunately, the majority of Americans do not regularly use sunscreen to protect themselves from the sun's harmful UV rays. One in five Americans will develop skin cancer during their lifetime as a result. Kids who spend a lot of time outdoors are at an especially high risk of sun overexposure. Skin cancer prevention is a lifetime effort that begins with good sun safety practices in childhood. The challenge is raising awareness of the fact that most cases of skin cancer can be prevented.

## YOUR INVOLVEMENT IS KEY

Pool Cool is all about collaboration. Members of the Kansas Cancer Partnership (KCP) shared resources and divvied up responsibilities when implementing the program. The Midwest Cancer Alliance coordinated the project, and hired student interns to run train-the-trainer sessions at local pools. Meanwhile, the Kansas Comprehensive Cancer Prevention & Control Program provided promotional items and signs about sun safety, and distributed free sunscreen by the gallon. Contact your local cancer control program to learn more about Pool Cool.

*"Pool Cool has been a great program for my pool. The lesson plans gave great information about how to be sun safe. It was helpful to get free sunscreen, sunglasses, and chapstick to hand out at my pool."*

- Bridget Starbuck

## Contact

### Ashley Adorante

Kansas Cancer Partnership/Midwest  
Cancer Alliance  
4350 Shawnee Mission Pkwy  
Fairway, KS 66205  
913-231-4099 phone  
913-945-6644 fax  
<http://www.cancerkansas.org>

## SOLUTION

The key to raising awareness is finding the perfect time to send the audience a message. Pool Cool is designed with this in mind. Eight sun safety lessons are added to existing swim lessons at community pools. With the sun in the sky overhead, swim instructors hand out sunscreen, sunglasses and UV wristbands, and discuss sun safety. Lessons are about five minutes long, and segue into regular swimming instruction. By training the aquatic staff to teach kids sun safety, lessons are taught by the people kids already know and trust. The train-the-trainer model is also important because those who teach are better at recalling what they've learned. In effect, the Pool Cool message resonates across generations and gets stronger every year.

## RESULTS

Pool Cool is research-tested, meaning there is documented evidence of its effectiveness. Studies show that participants have significantly better sun protection habits than their peers. Children who complete the program seek shade more often, and use sunscreen more regularly. Parents are also more likely to practice sun safety after their kids' participation in the program. The success of Kansas Pool Cool is its expansion. In its first year, 21 pools in the Kansas City area participated. By 2015, 33 pools across the state had joined the movement. This extended the program from Kansas City to Stockton, a town 306 miles away. In 2015 alone, the Midwest Cancer Alliance trained 669 pool staff to provide sun safety lessons to hundreds of kids. Kansas Pool Cool won the "2014 Aquatic Special Event of the Year" by the Kansas Recreation and Park Association, and was nominated again in 2015.

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### Contact CDC

<http://www.cdc.gov/cdc-info/requestform.html>

### Web site

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

The findings and conclusions in this success story are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position of the funding agencies or the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

## SUSTAINING SUCCESS

With support from the Kansas Cancer Partnership (KCP) and aquatic centers, Pool Cool will keep growing. The Midwest Cancer Alliance (MCA) will continue using interns to train-the-trainers at local pools. These interns keep the Pool Cool message relevant and exciting. Although this awareness campaign makes its biggest splash at outdoor pools during the summer, skin cancer is always a health risk, and KCP will look for ways to make a difference in the off-season. For this reason, MCA already holds health fairs and lunch-and-learn sessions throughout the year. The partnership's next goal is to reach more sites in western and southwestern Kansas. Ultimately, KCP would like to make sun safety cool at each and every pool in Kansas.

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